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For the Good of France

The French Experience in Africa



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Vive la France! The countries of Africa have long been the focus of the world's super powers. From colonization through independence to today, France has maintained significant relationships with many of Africa's countries. The examination that follows will illustrate that while French politicians may announce changes to their African foreign policy, the true nature of French interests remain unchanged. These interests can be summarized into three main objectives; to gain a strategic advantage, to gain an economic advantage, or to use its influence in African states to project a carefully crafted image of France to the international community.¹ The underlying *raison d'être* that France engages itself in Africa is for the good of France. This paper will first define the three objectives stated above and then, through an examination of France's actions in Rwanda in the early 1990s, Congo Brazzaville in the 1980's and 1990's, the Central African Republic in 1996-1998 and the Côte d'Ivoire from 2002-2006, it will demonstrate how France's actions have always been in pursuit of these objectives. It is this pursuit that demonstrates that, regardless of the needs of the African nations in which it is involved; France does what is best for France.

France's African policy seeks to secure two main strategic advantages for France; greater power in international politics and a military capability advanced in and funded by African countries. When the United Nations was formed, France was considered to be one of the world's great powers. It is precisely for this reason that France was awarded a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. The French position on the Security Council is unique in that they are neither aligned with the West, the United States and the United Kingdom, nor with the anti-west, Russia and China. This position empowers the French as tie breakers on issues where the other permanent members are divided, but also places them without traditional allies when they are seeking support on issues of importance to France. It is for this very reason that France seeks to

influence African heads of state so that they vote in allegiance with France when asked to. The French constitution and governmental structure coupled with liberal national laws has empowered the French president and his appointed staff, the Elysée, to maintain close relationships with many African leaders throughout the years. These close relationships have been nurtured by French politicians so as to translate into dependent relationships where France is the dominant partner. These lesser, dependent countries become France's strategic allies in international organizations such as the United Nations. By maintaining these strategic alliances, France is able to project more influence and to speak more confidently and boldly during international deliberations.

To maintain its super power status, France maintains a significant state of the art military. This large sophisticated military comes at a cost. The French government is able to afford its military capabilities because of the strategic advantage it is provided by Africa. Africa is not only a weapons proving ground for French companies but also a large market for French weapons. Due to the volume of sales, the French companies that sell weapons to Africa are financially able to invest more money into the research and development of new weapon systems. The French government, as a conduit for French arms dealers, benefits from these sales of weapons to Africa by receiving new weapons systems for a reduced rate. However, the military advantage gained from Africa is not only measured in technology. The French military plays a significant role in the development of soldiers in many African countries and it also provides advice to the senior leaders of these African states. These French taught soldiers become allies of the French troops and provide France with strategic, similar minded military support. These militaries also tend to respect French capabilities and support political leaders that align themselves with France.

France's economic goals are related very closely to its strategic ones. Politically and militarily aligned nations tend to trade together as well. There are two ways in which France seeks economic advantages from Africa; by securing privileged investment access for French companies to the African market and by providing African countries access to world markets. Africa has vast resources, both in terms of raw materials and potential consumer market but it also has a relatively low level of technological expertise. This combination, coupled with privileged status because of government to government agreements, enables French companies to be very successful in their economic ventures. These companies in turn support the French government bringing it full circle. The countries in Africa that are still developing need a market to sell their wares. Here again the French government aids the African countries by agreeing to be the conduit through which the countries get access to the European market. This 'enabler' status effectively makes French companies and the French government middle men, and is therefore of financial benefit to France.

The most accurate term to describe France's third and equally important goal in terms of its interests in Africa is the "identity advantage".² France's identity on the world stage is defined, in part, by its relationships with the countries in Africa. In developmental terms, France uses the African countries to "help to create France as a powerful state by being its weaker counterpart" and to "help to create it [France] as the helping, modern, developed state to whom they [African countries] are the traditional underdeveloped counterpart".³ Similarly, France can tailor its actions in Africa to portray itself as an international partner by participating in multilateral humanitarian operations, or as a significant military power capable of acting alone in either humanitarian or offensive military operations. By carefully managing its actions and thus its projected role in Africa, France is able to ensure that it maintains its status as a significant

power in the international community.

It is generally accepted that France's experiences through the 1990's in Rwanda served as the initial catalyst for a reformation of France's foreign policy for Africa. As such, to better understand France's transformation, it is imperative to provide a critical analysis of France's involvement in Rwanda prior to, during, and after the genocide. By outlining France's African policy under President François Mitterrand, and by revealing the information possessed by France at the time of the genocide it can be concluded that France was seeking to maintain political alliances with the French speaking government of Rwanda. By examining the French military's actions during Operation Turquoise it can also be concluded that France was attempting to portray itself as a conscientious humanitarian. To correlate intentions with actions, it is imperative to first understand the French governmental structure and the African policy of the day.

Under the presidency of François Mitterrand, as it had been since the end of colonization, France's policies with respect to Africa were established at the prerogative of the president. Articles 14 and 52 of the French Constitution allocated control of French African policy to the president (the Elysée) through the African Unit (Cellule Africaine). Additionally, as the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, as established by article 15, the French President retained the right to commit troops in overseas operations, including Africa, without first consulting the parliament.⁴ This inherent right of the President is singularly emphasized by President Mitterrand as quoted in *Le Monde* in 1993 "Not my ministers, but I am the one who determines French foreign policy ... Of course, my ministers are allowed to have their opinion, but a policy which does not have my approval is unthinkable."⁵

Although allocated the sole responsibility for the African policy, President Mitterrand

would have been unable to formulate and execute all policy without assistance from some of his Ministers and staff. The make-up of this advisory staff was at the discretion of the President and as such “French African politics was thus dominated and managed by a small, tightly knit community of politicians, diplomats and businessmen connected to the President.”⁶ Therefore, France’s African policies, leading up to the Rwandan genocide, were those conceived and implemented by Mitterrand and his closest allies. So what were these policies?

The motivation for French African policy in the early 1990’s was “a narrow conception of its national interests and blatantly disregards African concerns and interests.”⁷ France wished to continue to pursue relationships with francophone Africa, they wished to continue to project French culture in Africa and, they wished to maintain their influence in international politics.⁸ To carry out these policies, France continued to maintain close relationships with the heads of state of the governments of the French speaking countries in Africa. These relationships were often elitist and many of the African governments were not democratic by nature. Feeling pressure from the international community, President Mitterrand in 1990 at La Baule, stated that “French aid will be lukewarm towards authoritarian regimes and more enthusiastic for those initiating a democratic transition”.⁹ This would indicate an end to the French tradition of supporting governments, regardless of their practices, so long as they chose to align with French policy. However, even after the end of the genocide in Rwanda the French Minister of Cooperation Bernard Debré stated, “We [France] must therefore encourage, assist, and help stabilize those regimes and leaders who are progressing on the path to democratisation at their own pace.”¹⁰ The French government was still willing to support traditionally allied countries even if their governments were far from democratic.

This policy of supporting democratizing African governments is precisely where the

French government found itself with the Habyarimana government in Rwanda in 1994.

Habyarimana did relinquish some of his power in order to appear to be on the road to democratization, however contrary to “French policy, Paris did not support the newly established democratic parties but remained very close to the authoritarian elite”.¹¹

France’s African policy in the period leading up to the Rwandan genocide was one dominated by the interests of a few influential Frenchmen. Despite declaring otherwise, France continued to support many francophonie countries, ones in which French was the shared language of communication, regardless of their form of government. This support of French partisan Africans, specifically the Hutus in Rwanda, continued to influence French government decisions even in times when the government possessed information that should have lead them to abandon their traditional practices.

Failure to act on unconfirmed information is excusable; failure to act on reliable information is deplorable. Through the Elysée, the French had been intimately involved in Rwanda leading up to the genocide. France had signed a Military Cooperation Accord with the government of Rwanda in 1975 and this facilitated the permanent stationing of French troops in Rwanda. Their mission was to provide advice to senior Rwandan military leaders and to train both officers and non-commissioned members for the Forces Armées Rwandaises (FAR). Additionally, French government officials, particularly Georges Martres, France’s ambassador to Rwanda, enjoyed a close relationship with the governing elite. The relationship that French government and military officials shared with their Rwandan counterparts provided the French government with a unique view of the situation in Rwanda. The information relayed to Paris by France’s trusted agents living in Rwanda should have alerted Paris to what was about to happen.

As early as October of 1990, George Martres informed those in Paris responsible for

African policy that “the Tutsi are convinced that if there was a total victory for the present regime [Hutu], the departure of the French and Belgian troops would result in the aggravation of the repression and the persecutions, and would lead to a the total elimination of the Tutsi”.¹²

That same month, France’s Military Attachée in Kigali, Colonel René Galinié, informed Paris that if the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), who had launched an attack in the north-east of Rwanda on the 1st of October, tried to gain power that it would “in all likelihood, lead to the physical elimination of the 500,000 to 700,000 Tutsi inside Rwanda by the 7,000,000 Hutu”.¹³

Yet even after presenting this information to Paris, both Ambassador Martres and Colonel Galinié viewed the RPF as an invading force and still supported the Habyarimana government by continuing to provide military assistance in the form of French troops and even provided advice to the FAR in their fight against the RPF. In fact, the French government continued to support the Habyarimana government with French troops until the 15th of December of 1993 when, experts agree, the plan for the extermination of the Tutsi had already been formulated by the radicals within the Rwandan government and military. With the close relationships that the French shared with both the Rwandan government and military, it is highly unlikely that the French were not aware of what was to come. Proof of this comes from General Roméo Dallaire when describing the reactions of the Ambassadors of Belgium and the United States and the chargé d’affaires of France after being briefed on what has become known as the Genocide Cable. Gen Dallaire states “None of them appeared to be surprised, which led me to conclude that our informant was merely confirming what they already knew. I pleaded with them to help us... but... [they] refused to assist.”¹⁴ It can be inferred that, with information that should have led them to other courses of action, France’s continued support of the Hutu government was intended to maintain a political ally.

The arrival of French paratroops to evacuate French foreign nationals and select Rwandans, including Habyarimana's widow, only three days after the commencement of the killing is further evidence that the French had information of what was about to take place. Yet still France did nothing to bring the information to the world's attention. There can be only one reason for this; it was not in the best interest of France to expose what it knew. If this was the case though, then why on the 15th of June, 1994 did the French government decide to launch a humanitarian mission of its own to Rwanda? An analysis of Operation Turquoise will reveal that, although the French undoubtedly helped to save the lives of many Rwandans, the French government's decision to send troops was self-motivated.

As stated above, Operation Turquoise likely saved the lives of hundreds of thousands of Rwandans. This is an admirable feat that is somewhat tarnished when one looks at France's underlying motive for the policies adopted by the French peace keepers. The French sent 2,500 French and Senegalese troops establishing Zones Humanitaires Sures, safe humanitarian zones, in the southwestern part of Rwanda that was still under Hutu control.¹⁵ The United Nations' (UN) mandate for Operation Turquoise was for it to contribute "to the security and protection of displaced persons, refugees and civilians in danger ... including the establishment and maintenance... of safe humanitarian areas."¹⁶ France, with the UN's permission, was to prevent the RPF from entering these areas in order to prevent reciprocal killings of Hutus by Tutsis. To this extent it was effective, however, since the eventual RPF victory was virtually assured by the time the safe zones were established, many of the extremist Hutus who had formulated or executed the plan for the genocide sought out refuge in the safe zone to avoid persecution for their actions.

The establishment of the safe zones with French Military supervision did facilitate the

delivery of the aid for the hundreds of thousands of displaced people in the area. However, France's failure to disarm the region, and continued support of the Hutu regime, enabled extremist Hutus to continue killing Tutsi and moderate Hutus with, in effect, French Military protection. This contradicts wholeheartedly with the UN's reason for sanctioning France's operation. France's underlying purpose for establishing Operation Turquoise was best articulated by its commander, General Jean-Claude Lafourcade, when he "admitted that the safe zone was intended to keep alive the Hutu government in the hope that it would deny the RPF total victory and international recognition as the rulers of Rwanda" and that "it was also an opportunity for France to help leading members of the regime to flee."¹⁷ France was desperate in its hopes that Rwanda would remain under Francophonie influence.

What conclusions can be drawn from the information provided above? What were the underlying reasons for the actions and inactions taken by France in Rwanda leading up to, during and after the extremist Hutu-led genocide? French government officials, with their desire to keep Rwanda under France's Francophonie umbrella, even after reporting of the potential for mass killings, continued to support the Rwandan government because of its alliance with France. The French believed that the International community would not recognize the RPF leaders as legitimate and thus, by continuing to support the Hutus, France would assure itself of a favored status by the Rwandan government once the Hutus reestablished themselves. This would ensure a strong political alliance for French leaders when France required support outside of Africa. Additionally, it can be argued that France's humanitarian intervention, Operation Turquoise, was an extension of their Francophonie policy disguised as a humanitarian mission whose purpose was to present the international community an image of France as a conscientious, rapid responding UN task force. In short, France, or rather, a small elite group within France, was

seeking to advance its strategic and international identity objectives; acting in the best interests of France, not of Rwanda.

Before moving on, it is important to recognize that although France is partially to blame for permitting the genocide to occur in Rwanda, it is not solely to blame. Other countries, specifically Belgium, the United States and General Dallaire's Canada must certainly share in the blame. These countries were made aware of the plot to commit genocide and even if they initially doubted the reliability of the information, the events that occurred in the first few days after Habyarimana's airplane was shot down, the catalyst for the genocide, should have confirmed to them the gravity of the situation and thus mobilized them into action. These countries also failed to act in the best interest of the people of Rwanda. They failed to be humanitarians.

Less than three years after its troubles in Rwanda, France was again to experience trouble in one of its typically allied African countries, Congo Brazzaville. Here again, a review of the history surrounding the events leading up to the Congo Brazzaville civil war will reveal that although the French government cannot be held solely responsible for the escalation of the conflict, they can be apportioned some of the blame for not intervening and assisting the legitimate governing president. The French were again seeking to further their objectives.

Congo Brazzaville (The Republic of Congo) is a country rich in oil reserves. It is for this reason that the French state owned oil company Elf Aquitaine (Elf) had established themselves as the dominant oil company there. Elf was able to maintain its considerably powerful market share, in part due to the liberal French laws that permitted it to use offshore money to pay African decision makers to continue to favor them. Additional methods of paying off Congolese officials were devised including oil-backed loans that were designed "to balance the accounts of

the producer states, to allow them generally to pay civil servants' salaries and avoid revolts".¹⁸

Prior to the democratization of Congo Brazzaville, Elf was state owned and practiced a policy of supporting the existing government.¹⁹ This policy meant paying large sums of money to politicians that had close ties to the Elysée in Paris. Many of these African politicians owned property in France and maintained bank accounts with French banks, in particular with the French Intercontinental Bank for Africa (FIBA) that was set up by the former governor of the Bank of France. These kickbacks had made it possible for Elf to gain control of the majority of the oil rights in Congo Brazzaville prior to the first democratic elections that were to be held in 1992. At this time, Pascal Lissouba, who was running for president in the election, approached Elf seeking financial backing in the form of an oil-backed loan to help finance his run for the presidency. Elf denied Lissouba the requested loan hoping that the former head of state, Denis Sassou-Nguesso, would win the election and thus Elf would be able to maintain its relationship with him. Lissouba decided to seek the money elsewhere and secured the requested \$150M USD from American oil companies interested in a share of the oil rights in Congo Brazzaville. With the money secured, Lissouba ended up achieving his goal of becoming president. Elf, worried that its oil rights might be threatened by American interests, was reported to have paid off Lissouba's loan in order to reassert their position and to maintain their market dominance.

Leading up to the following elections, in 1997, supporters of Sassou-Nguesso clashed with Lissouba's government forces. The fighting led to the election being canceled, Sassou-Nguesso assuming the presidency, Lissouba being forced into exile and Congo Brazzaville being thrust into a two-year civil war. During the escalation of hostilities, wary of Lissouba's previous dealings with American oil companies, Elf, which privatized in 1994, is reported to have supported Sassou-Nguesso through funding and by providing access to arms dealers in France.

This 'help' from Elf facilitated Sassou-Nguesso's return to power.

So how do the actions of a, then privately owned, French company lead to accusations that France is partially to blame for the civil war in Congo Brazzaville? The answer to this is two-fold. First, although there is no concrete evidence to prove that the French government was aware of all of Elf's dealings, based on some of the factors that are presented below it is reasonable to deduce that they were. Second, Operation Pelican, France's humanitarian evacuation mission to Congo Brazzaville in 1997, although very successful at evacuating foreign nationals, could have instead been tasked to support the Lissouba government until the end of the election process thereby potentially preventing the civil war.

Although some of Elf's payments to the African leaders were legal under French law, the loans and other payments made in Congo Brazzaville were not. It was not until 1994 when French auditors discovered Elf's investment of 780 million francs into a textile industry, a peculiar investment for an oil company, that the true nature of Elf's dealings started to be revealed.²⁰ Elf had operated by its own set of rules without fear of investigation for a long time because it was "rumored to operate as a piggy bank for its political friends at home and abroad".²¹ French magistrate Eva Joly, began an investigation that culminated in the arrest, trial and sentencing of key people at Elf including Loik Le Floch-Prigent, Elf's Chief executive officer from 1989-1993. Le Floch-Prigent was the former presidentially appointed head of the state owned company Rhone-Poulenc and had been appointed to the position at Elf by President Mitterrand. Ironically in 1996, six months prior to his arrest for his involvement with Elf, Le Floch-Prigent was appointed the head of the French railway system by President Jacques Chirac who had vowed to clean up corruption in the government.

Joly's investigation focused on Elf's actions in the late 1980's and early 1990's.

Although this period is prior to the alleged Elf support for Sassou-Nguesso in the civil unrest prior to the 1997 elections, many of those involved were still employed with Elf at the time of the insurrection. Alfred Sirven, the executive running Elf Aquitaine International, whose payroll included links to former ministers, fled France in 1997 and when he was finally extradited to France from the Philippines in 2001 he “swallowed the computer chip in his cell phone, so his telephone contacts while in exile have remained unknown.”²² Although his phone contact list was lost, his address book was discovered and “it included the private phone numbers of some of the most prominent politicians and business men in France.”²³ When Sirven took the stand in 2001 he refused to testify and no further information was revealed.

The combination of the role and make-up of the Elysée in African affairs and the fact that Le Floch-Prigent had been appointed by President Mitterrand leads to the inevitable conclusion that some in the French government were aware and endorsed the methods that Elf was using in Congo Brazzaville into the early 1990’s. It is also arguable that Sirven’s address book coupled with his refusal to testify demonstrates that there were those in the Chirac government who were aware of Elf’s actions during the lead up to the Congo Brazzaville civil war in 1997. The French government permitted a French oil company, that was known to operate illegally, to maintain operations because it represented a major French interest in Congo Brazzaville. The French government, by turning a blind eye, was able to support a political ally and was able to secure economic access for Elf and ultimately, oil for France.

A failed arrest attempt led to the outbreak of the fighting between Sassou-Nguesso and Lissouba’s Army on the fourth of June 1997. French troops in Brazzaville immediately moved into and secured positions at the Maya-Maya International airport and began the process of carrying out humanitarian evacuation operations for foreign nationals living in Congo

Brazzaville. The French government directed another 500 troops to augment the 450 already maintaining airport security. These troops arrived on the eighth of June, bringing with them armored vehicles to help maintain convoy security outside of the airport. Operation Pelican continued successfully, terminating on the 15th of June. The operation was by all accounts a success with only one French soldier losing his life.²⁴ To bolster their international image, the French government ordered its soldiers to help to evacuate from Congo Brazzaville, the foreign nationals from other countries around the world.

What the history of this operation does not tell us is why the French troops did not intervene in the fighting in the city. Only three years after Rwanda, where a removal of forces led to genocide, the French government did not attempt a course of action other than abandonment. The fact that the French military was able to engage in evacuation operations within two days of the commencement of fighting, leads one to the conclusion that the French government was aware of the volatility of the situation prior to the outbreak of the fighting and were prepared for it. Both Lissouba's and Sassou-Nguesso's fighters considered the airport to be off limits and sought to keep the French forces out of the fighting. This demonstrates the powerful position that the French government had, had they decided to intervene. We will never know whether an intervention by France, until elections could once again be held, would have prevented the ensuing civil war. What we do know is that with Sassou-Nguesso assuming the presidency, the French government once again had a political ally in Congo Brazzaville's leader.

An investigation of Elf's unscrupulous business methods in Congo Brazzaville and of Operation Pelican cannot conclusively confirm that the French government was aware of all of the wrongdoings of Elf. The evidence does show that Elf was acting in its own best interests in order to maintain its majority oil rights. The fact that the top Elf executives maintained close

connections with members of the Elysée suggests that the French government was aware of Elf's business practices and of the situation in Congo Brazzaville. The rapid response of the French forces to the crisis further confirms this. The French government was aware of the political and economic situation in Congo Brazzaville and carefully managed both their actions and inactions in order to advance their economic, strategic and identity objectives. Once again, one can't directly link the French government to the wrongdoing in Congo Brazzaville, but they can be considered indirectly responsible for facilitating the exile of Lissouba and for the resulting civil war.

After the fighting broke out in Congo Brazzaville coupled with the scandal that was unfolding at home in France involving ELF executives' unscrupulous business practices, the French government decided to modify its African policy. At the end of August 1997, France's president Jacques Chirac announced the dissolution of the 'cellule africaine'. This new policy marked the end of French neo-colonial intervention and 'francophonie' policies and practices in Africa. It was aimed at dissolving the network of personal relationships that the Elysée had been maintaining with African heads of state since its establishment under President Charles de Gaulle in 1966. The intent of the French government was to demonstrate, to both French citizens and France's international partners, that France was taking a new direction in its relationship with Africa. This new relationship would give countries in Africa more responsibility for their governance and was to be less neo-colonial.²⁵

Although this announcement coincided with the elimination of a number of positions within the government associated with 'francophonie', the structure and responsibilities of the Elysée remained unchanged. France, who was in the process of downsizing its foreign military commitments, did indeed begin the withdrawal of some of its troops from Africa and declared

that it “would not go it alone in instituting any programme [in Africa]: ‘We must do it with our European partners,’ ”²⁶ This policy, that was publicly hailed to be to the advantage of African states, was also of great benefit to France. It permitted France to drastically reduce spending by reducing troops abroad and it elevated France’s status in the European Union. Yet again the French government took actions that were in the best interest of France. Whether or not this new French policy changed how France would deal with Africa is revealed in the examination of France’s military and humanitarian missions in Africa since 1997.

Since its independence from France in 1960, the Central African Republic (CAR) has been marked by many years of rebel violence and difficulties in governance. Prior to President Chirac’s announcement of France’s intent to reduce its presence in Africa, France operated military bases in CAR, assisted in two presidential coups (1966, 1979) and helped to establish CAR’s first democratic elections in 1993. At the time, CAR was one of the poorest countries in Africa and was very dependent on foreign aid. To enable itself to maintain bases and provide a market for weapon sales, the French government provided most of the foreign aid that CAR was receiving. As a majority aid supplier, France benefitted by getting political backing from the CAR government leaders when they asked it of them. In 1996, during a rebel militia demonstration against the President Ange-Felix Patasse for failing to pay his militia for more than three months, French troops helped to enforce order in the streets to help protect French citizens and eventually to help evacuate them. French soldiers also led the peace negotiations between President Patasse and the militia leader.²⁷ Negotiating the peace agreement and helping to set up the follow-on peacekeeping force demonstrated to the world France’s power in dispute resolution and peace negotiations. By helping Patasse to stay in power and by negotiating peace, France was able to maintain an ally and to project a strong image of France to the world.

In 1997 France contributed significant financial and logistical support to the African peacekeeping force in CAR, MISAB, but announced its intentions to repatriate its military forces to France. The UN, realizing that MISAB would be unable to sustain itself without French support, instituted MINURCA in early 1998. Although this UN force included some French troops, France's presence and financial commitment were significantly reduced. This retreat from CAR indicates that France was showing the world that it was adhering to its new policy. In so doing though, it was leaving others to try to help bring peace to CAR.

France maintained a presence in CAR however, by committing troops to help to train the CAR military and to provide aerial reconnaissance. The training mandated French forces, including Mirage fighter aircraft, were involved in both 2006 and 2007 to counter rebel forces. France's commitment to withdraw and subsequent involvement in offensive operations indicates a contradiction in policy and reality. France's continued commitment to the government of CAR indicates an underlying desire to maintain a close relationship like those between the Elysée and African heads of state prior to the 1997 announcement.

By 2002, the French policy for African intervention, although not officially articulated, was one of multi-nationalism. France was still willing to intervene in African affairs; it merely preferred international sanctioning to help to erase the perception that France was still neocolonial in its relations with Africa. An examination of French actions in the Côte d'Ivoire from 2002 until early 2006 will reveal that while French methods may have evolved, France continues to view itself as superior and its actions seek to advance its strategic, economic and identity objectives.

In September of 2002, three days after a failed military coup, France mobilized its troops in Côte d'Ivoire for the "protection and evacuation of French expatriates and other foreigners

who wished to escape the civil war.”²⁸ Fearing that the troops still loyal to him would be unable to defeat the dissenters, the president of Côte d’Ivoire, Laurent Gbagbo, insisted that French forces intervene. He believed that the French were compelled to intervene on his behalf due to a 1961 bilateral defense accord. The French government, citing that the fighting constituted an internal conflict and not an outside threat to Côte d’Ivoire ‘ssovereignty, elected to position itself as a peacekeeping force vice intervening on the side of Gbagbo.²⁹ This neutral stance was welcomed by the international community and permitted France to continue to stabilize a country in which French companies had significant economic investment. Additionally, both President Gbagbo and his principle opposition, Alassane Outtara had close relationships with members of the Elysée. By not committing support to one side or the other the French government was setting itself up to be able to maintain a positive relationship no matter which side was successful in their bid to assume power.³⁰ French forces have remained in the Côte d’Ivoire up to this day, and although their stance claims to be neutral, there is evidence that they have acted on the side of both the rebels and the government at different times.

In January of 2003, President Jacques Chirac invited the feuding parties to peace negotiations in France. The Linas-Marcoussis accords that were signed at these meetings allocated the defense and internal affairs minister positions to the rebels. Gbagbo, having not personally attended the peace negotiations, was enraged and found the agreement to be unacceptable. The agreement, although there is no concrete evidence to support it, was reported to have been proposed and endorsed by Chirac who was known to dislike the Ivorian president.³¹ This again is evidence of the power of the French president and his Elysée. However, not to be seen to favor the opposition, during Operation Licorne French troops provided logistical support to Gbagbo’s forces and gave them access through the French held safe zone in order to attack

rebel forces in the town of Bouaké.³² In 2004, the French once again supported the rebels by attacking and virtually eliminating Gbagbo's air force after it was reported to have mistakenly attacked a French air base. This series of reversals of support clearly demonstrates that France was not trying to end the fighting in Côte d'Ivoire but merely trying to maintain its position as a dominant power in the region. The French government was acutely aware that French businesses held significant investments in Côte d'Ivoire that amounted to "between 55% and 65% of the total stock of foreign investment capital."³³

In 2002 France assumed what appeared to be a non-traditional role for France. The French were able to react quickly to the crisis when no other international power could, and they gave the appearance that they were applying lessons that they had learned from the mistakes made in Rwanda. Although Operation Licorne cannot be viewed as having prevented genocide, as many French newspapers have claimed, it certainly saved the lives of many Ivoirians by preventing the escalation of fighting. Côte d'Ivoire certainly benefitted from French efforts, but a close look reveals that France's decision to intervene was based on the interests of France. The French government was able to maintain close relations with both sides of the warring parties ensuring that they would have a political ally regardless of who eventually came to power. Their Operation Licorne identified the French as ardent humanitarians and when they took aggressive military action without international consent, they were able to maintain international favor by claiming that their forces had been specifically targeted. Finally, by maintaining a strong military presence, the French government was able to ensure the safety of French business interests in Côte d'Ivoire and thus contribute to the economic benefit of France. As in the three examples above, French actions in Côte d'Ivoire sought to further their interests; to gain strategic, economic, and identity advantages.

Since decolonization the French government's African policy has undergone many revisions. This paper has argued that although the policy may have changed, France's underlying interests have not. The structure of the French government, specifically the power of the Elysée, continues to enable a small, closely knit group of individuals to set the French policy for Africa. The presidential power to select those involved in African affairs creates a lack of transparency that permits this small group to make recommendations to the President, based on narrow, elitists' points of view.

This examination of French involvement in Rwanda, Congo Brazzaville, the Central African Republic, and the Cote d'Ivoire has illustrated that France always acts in her own best interests, whether it is to seek a strategic advantage, an economic advantage, or to project an image of France to the international community.



Epilogue

This paper focused on the experiences of France in Africa from the late 1980's until 2006. I feel that my criticism of the French policies and actions is warranted but I also think that it is necessary to comment on French actions and policies since Nicolas Sarkozy was elected as president. In completing this further research I was seeking to discover whether or not there is hope for a better relationship between France and the countries of Africa. The few notes that follow will demonstrate that although there has been a modification of the French foreign policy for Africa, President Sarkozy and the Elysée still look at the countries of Africa with a condescending glare.

At first glance, Sarkozy's policy for Africa looks like a step in the right direction. The policy "features a reduction and consolidation of France's military presence to align it more closely with Africa's regional structures, more "business-like" relations replacing the "France-Afrique" model, larger EU and UN roles, and increased expectations in terms of transparency, good governance, and results on the part of Africans receiving French aid."³⁴ But how does reality match policy? Interestingly, in the first of three speeches to Africans in Africa, Sarkozy stressed not a model in which they would work together as partners, but merely stated that Africans had to take responsibility for themselves. He declared in his speech that "the tragedy of Africa is that the African has not fully entered into history".³⁵ When elaborating on this theme Sarkozy described the tradition of African peasants living according to natural rhythms as "no place...for the idea of progress."³⁶

The reviews of Sarkozy's speeches and other comments that have followed have led to a generalization that although French involvement in Africa is declining, it has merely been in the interest of France. Facing competition from the Chinese, whose practices are often considered

unscrupulous, the French have begun to withdraw from Africa. For France, the cost of maintaining a presence, coupled with bad press that is often associated with French military intervention in Africa, outweigh the economic and resource benefits Africa can provide for France. More and more Sarkozy's speeches and comments leave one with the impression that he sees the continent of Africa "as a hopeless nuisance—and that his real interest was [is] tighter controls on visas and immigration to France."³⁷ This research has demonstrated to me that again the French practice of seeking to gain strategic, economic and identity advantages continues.

Although this paper draws a considerably unfavorable picture of the intentions of France it has also led me to the conclusion that France is not alone. For every article I reviewed about French policies, I found a considerable number of articles outlining equally disturbing practices by other countries seeking to benefit from relationships with Africa. Africa's abundant natural resources, especially oil and minerals, are also its curse. From everything that I have read and from what we have discussed in class, I believe that the countries of Africa face a very rough and difficult road ahead. I certainly hope that not only will some dynamic and ethical leaders try to lead Africa forward but also that these leaders will be supported by the people of Africa.

Endnotes

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